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The California Museum announces the opening of the Unity Center on Sat., Aug. 26th

New long-term exhibition initiated in response to 1999 hate crimes celebrates the state's civil rights history & diverse people, customs & cultures, inspiring visitors to take a stand against hate, intolerance & bigotry as Unity Activists

SACRAMENTO, CALIF. — Aug. 16, 2017: The California Museum today announced the opening of the Unity Center on Sat., Aug. 26, 2017. Originally conceived in response to a series of Northern California hate crimes by a pair of far-right white supremacists during the 1999 “Summer of Hate,” the new long-term interactive exhibition celebrates the state’s civil rights history and diverse people, customs and cultures and is the first of its kind in California to inspire visitors to take an active stance against hate, intolerance and bigotry as Unity Activists.

“Thank you to the California Museum for helping make our dream a reality,” said Darrell Steinberg, Mayor of Sacramento. “For 19 years many of us have dreamt and worked for this day. When Sacramento was hit with a horrendous series of hate crimes in 1999, the community stood up and insisted on building a permanent commitment to fight hate and intolerance. Many thousands of people, especially young people, will never forget what they experience here. The state and country will be much better as a result.”

Shortly after the 1999 attacks, which were widely covered by national media during a 4-month period of increased violence and hate crimes targeting marginalized groups that came to be called the “Summer of Hate,” former Sacramento Mayor Joe Serna and a coalition of Sacramento civic leaders announced plans to build an institution dedicated to teaching tolerance at a rally in support of the Jewish and LGBTQ communities. In the years that followed, the Unity Center developed rich media and interactive content, delivered statewide education workshops and developed plans to build a brand-new facility to house its exhibits and programs. During the 2008 recession, however, the project’s efforts came to a standstill.

In 2013, the California Museum’s Board of Trustees approached then-Senate President Pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg, a former member of the Unity Center’s Board of Directors, with the prospect of bringing the Center to the Museum. With Steinberg’s support, the project moved to the California Museum in 2014, where it would be housed in a 4,000-sq. ft. gallery and adjoining classroom as a long-term installation.

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“We are excited to finally open the Unity Center at California Museum,” said Richard S. Costigan III, Chair of the Museum’s Board of Trustees. “Thanks to the hard work and dedication of the project’s many supporters, donors and partners over the last 18 years, the important exhibition will finally be open to the public, educating over 175,000 annual visitors in the coming year and inspiring unity in communities across California at a time tolerance and unity are needed more than ever.”

Among topics covered in the exhibition are many current issues facing Californians and Americans today, including hate crimes, racial profiling and religious freedom, immigration, civil rights, equality and gender identity. In the “Facing Assumptions” exhibit, for example, visitors are immersed in conversations between members of marginalized groups including African Americans, Latino immigrants and transgender individuals, who share deeply personal experiences facing common stereotypes and misconceptions. In another section titled “Courage to Act,” visitors explore animated situations and recognize the bystander’s role in standing up to harassment, hate, intolerance and bullying. The core of the Unity Center offers examples of Californians past and present who have successfully stood up for their rights and for the rights of others using a variety of tools, from artistic expression to peaceful civil disobedience.

“The Unity Center at the California Museum offers a powerful view of California’s rich civil rights history,” California Secretary of State Alex Padilla said. “Through interactive exhibits it brings the past to life and inspires dialogue about the importance of more tolerant, inclusive communities. Diversity is one of California’s greatest strengths. It should be celebrated because we have so much more in common than divides us, and so much more we can share with one another.”

To further the Unity Center’s learning experiences, the Museum will also offer accompanying gallery-based education programs, starting with field trip tours for elementary and high school students aligned with Common Core, California State Content Standards and Civics outcomes. Launching on Tues., Aug. 29 for the 2017-18 school year, tours feature social-emotional learning opportunities through a classroom presentation on civics, democracy and activism led by a Museum docent, a self-guided exhibition tour and an activity sheet. Additional programs geared toward working professionals and the public are currently in development and scheduled to begin in 2018.

On Sat., Aug. 26, the Museum will host the Unity Center Block Party to commemorate the Unity Center’s opening through a day-long celebration of unity and diversity. Highlights include free admission for all visitors from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; a civil rights panel with Dolores Huerta, Stuart Milk of the Harvey Milk Foundation and California State Sen. Holly Mitchell (D, 30th) moderated by CNN’s Lisa Ling from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.; and an address by Mayor Darrell Steinberg at 12:00 p.m. Additional festivities at the Unity Center Block Party include free light rail transportation; hands-on activities for kids; dance and music performances by a wide variety of cultural organizations; food trucks; beer garden and more encouraging unity in the community.

“I am thrilled to moderate a timely discussion on civil rights,” said Lisa Ling, host of CNN’s “This Is Life with Lisa Ling” and honorary member of the Museum’s Board of Trustees. “As a Sacramento native, I am proud to facilitate a discussion that incorporates the voices of such an amazing group of panelists, and to be a part of this event bringing the community together to celebrate diversity and a positive conclusion to the terrible events that initiated it.”

For more information on the Unity Center exhibition and the Unity Center Block Party, visit californiamuseum.org/unity.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA MUSEUM:

A self-supporting 501(c)3 non-profit, the California Museum — home of the California Hall of Fame — engages, educates and enlightens people about California’s rich history and unique contributions to the world through ideas, innovation, arts and culture. Through interactive and innovative experiences, the Museum inspires visitors to make their own mark on history. Open Tues.-Sat. 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Sun.: 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Admission: adults \$9.00; college students & seniors \$7.50 with valid ID; youth 6-17: \$7.00; kids 5 and under free. For more information, visit californiamuseum.org.

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